

Indiana House of Representatives

News and Information

*Media Office
Democratic Caucus
John Schorg, Director
Statehouse, Room 157
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204
1-800-382-9842 or 1-317-232-9621
Fax Number: 1-317-232-9792*

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PELATH: TOLL HIKES PLUS FOREIGN-OWNED ROADS EQUAL BIG ZERO FOR MOTORISTS

INDIANAPOLIS – By proposing increases in Indiana Toll Road fees and calling for private operation of those roadways, Gov. Mitch Daniels is paving the way toward creating even more problems for residents of Northern Indiana, according to State Rep. Scott Pelath (D-Michigan City).

"At a time when we are facing record gasoline prices, the Daniels Administration today announced a \$10.7 billion transportation improvement plan that would nearly double the fees for people who travel along Interstate 90," Pelath said. "It is upsetting to many of us that these fees will be increased to help pay for projects outside of LaPorte County. I don't think area residents will be too delighted to face the prospect of paying more in tolls to finance improvements in Lake County and other areas.

"In his press release on this plan, the governor said he wanted to be more 'creative and aggressive,'" Pelath added. "I'm not sure about the creative part, but it certainly is an aggressive move against LaPorte County commuters, considering that we are already paying more than \$2.50 a gallon for gasoline. These hikes couldn't be coming at a worse time, with pump prices expected soar again in the aftermath of Hurricane Rita."

Pelath also expressed deep misgivings about the possibility of leasing the Indiana Toll Road to private interests. He said experiences in other states show that public highways fall under the control of either profit-driven organizations with incentives to raise tolls or foreign corporations that send money out of the country.

"When Illinois sold the Chicago Skyway to the highest bidder, it fell into the hands of investors from Spain and Australia, with the profits going back to those countries instead of being used to improve local roads," Pelath said. "I have grave reservations about the possibility of handing our state's roads over to the Germans, Russians or Chinese.

"Our federal government already is borrowing and spending money from foreign investors at record rates," he continued. "Are we now going to dangle public assets like highways into the international marketplace? This notion was roundly dismissed in the Legislature earlier this year, and it is unbelievable that it has risen from the grave."

Pelath intends to oppose any plan to raise tolls or privatize the Indiana Toll Road. He said that any transportation measures should include a fair distribution of toll road revenues, as well as a commitment to ensuring that Indiana's roads belong to the people of this state.

"I will never criticize the governor for being timid, but there is a fine line between being bold and being reckless," Pelath said. "I hope he hasn't crossed the line with this plan, but there will be ample time for the Legislature to fully analyze and debate these proposals in 2006."

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This press release can be accessed on the Internet at www.IN.gov/H09